

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 148224

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: GB, SHUM

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS: DRAFT COUNTRY ACTION PLAN

1. THE FOLLOWING DRAFT COUNTRY ACTION PLAN ON HUMAN RIGHTS FOR SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE WAS PREPARED IN AF/C AND IS FORWARDED FOR EMBASSY COMMENT. AS PRESENT REQUIREMENTS CALL FOR THE SUBMISSION OF THE FINAL ACTION PLAN ON JULY 1, EMBASSY IS REQUESTED TO SUBMIT ITS COMMENTS AND RECOMENDATIONS BY JUNE 29.

2. HUMAN RIGHTS COUNTRY ACTION PLAN
-- SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE

A. CONDITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE:

THE PRINCIPAL FACT TO BEAR IN MIND IS THAT SAO TOME IS A MINI-COUNTRY WITH ONLY 372 SQUARE MILES OF TERRITORY AND APPROXIMATELY 75,000 PEOPLE. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ARE PRACTICALLY ON A FIRST NAME BASIS WITH MOST CITIZENS. THE PORTUGUESE SUCCESSFULLY KEPT THE ISLANDS ISOLATED
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FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD DURING THE FIVE CENTURIES OF

COLONIAL RULE AND THERE WAS LITTLE VIOLENCE OR POLITICAL OPPRESSION DURING THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO INDEPENDENCE. THE NEW GOVERNMENT HAS BENEFITED FROM THIS RELATIVELY PEACEFUL CHANGE TO INDEPENDENCE AND HAS INSTITUTED A TRANQUIL POLITICAL SYSTEM WHICH MAINTAINS

MOST INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED HUMAN RIGHTS.

THE CONSTITUTION CONTAINS A CHAPTER GUARANTEEING THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES OF CITIZENS. THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF RIGHTS OF MAN IS SPECIFICALLY RECOGNIZED IN THE CONSTITUTION AND THE GOVERNMENT IS CHARGED WITH CREATING THE CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR THEIR FULFILLMENT. NO "STATE OF SIEGE" OR EMERGENCY SITUATION EXISTS. THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM IS ORGANIZED UNDER A SUPREME COURT CHOSEN BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. JUDGES ARE CHARGED BY THE CONSTITUTION TO OBEY ONLY THE LAW AND THEIR CONSCIENCE IN EXERCISING THEIR LEGAL FUNCTIONS. THE COURTS APPEAR TO APPLY THE LAW IMPARTIALLY AND THERE ARE NO KNOWN POLITICAL PRISONERS OR DETAINEES.

THERE ARE NO REPORTS OF TORTURE, CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING PUNISHMENT, ARBITRARY ARREST OR IMPRISONMENT, DENIALS OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL, OR INVASION OF THE HOME.

CIVIL LIBERTIES APPEAR TO BE REASONABLY WELL RESPECTED; PRIVATE PROPERTY IS PERMITTED BY THE CONSTITUTION AS LONG AS IT DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH THE GENERAL WELFARE. THE GOVERNMENT HAS NATIONALIZED LARGE LAND HOLDINGS WHICH BELONGED TO EXPATRIATE INTERESTS. LOCAL SMALL PROPERTY OWNERS HAVE CONTINUED THEIR PRIVATE OPERATIONS.

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POLITICAL LIBERTIES ARE MORE RESTRICTED. THE CONSTITUTION RECOGNIZES FREEDOM OF RELIGION, SPEECH AND THOUGHT AS WELL AS ASSEMBLY, ASSOCIATION AND DEMONSTRATION. HOWEVER, WITH THE EXISTENCE OF A ONE PARTY STATE, POLITICAL ASSOCIATION IS LIMITED TO THE NATIONAL PARTY, AND THE ONLY PRACTICAL PUBLIC EXPRESSION IS THROUGH THE PARTY NEWSPAPER. SOME FORMER MEMBERS OF NOW DISBANDED OPPOSITION POLITICAL GROUPS REMAIN IN THE COUNTRY AND APPARENTLY SUFFER NO PREJUDICIAL TREATMENT AT THE HANDS OF THE PRESENT PARTY AND GOVERNMENT. SEVERAL FORMER POLITICAL OPPONENTS OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT ARE THOUGHT TO BE IN EXILE IN ANGOLA, BUT PRESIDENT DA COSTA OF SAO TOME HAS ANNOUNCED PUBLICLY THAT THE EXILES ARE FREE TO RETURN WHENEVER THEY WISH.

THE PHYSICAL ISOLATION OF THE ISLANDS IS ITSELF AN EFFECTIVE BARRIER TO FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND VISAS ARE REQUIRED TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, RESTRICTIONS ON MOVEMENTS SEEM AIMED AT PROTECTING THE COUNTRY'S WEAK CURRENCY AND STOPPING ILLEGAL IMPORTS RATHER THAN PREVENTING SAO TOMEANS THEMSELVES FROM LEAVING THE ISLAND.

THE GOVERNMENT OF SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE IS CONSCIOUSLY STATIST AND ITS ECONOMIC POLICIES, IN THE JUDGMENT OF SOME OBSERVERS, RISK DAMAGING ITS EFFORTS TO PROVIDE BASIC NEEDS FOR FOOD, SHELTER, HEALTH CARE, AND EDUCATION. THE GOVERNMENT IS ATTEMPTING TO REORGANIZE AND REFORM THE ECONOMY, BUT HAS SEVERELY LIMITED HUMAN RESOURCES TO WORK WITH. THE NATIONALIZATION OF THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR COULD THEREFORE RESULT IN AN ECONOMIC DECLINE, AS THE GOVERNMENT FINDS ITSELF UNABLE TO REPLACE IT WITH A MORE EFFICIENT AND DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM. HOWEVER THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS MOTIVATED BY IDEOLOGICAL CONCERNS AND IS UNLIKELY TO BE DISSUADED FROM ITS "REVOLUTIONARY" PROGRAM BY IMPLEMENTATION
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PROBLEMS. SAO TOME HAS BEEN PROMISED A LARGE AMOUNT OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FROM A NUMBER OF GOVERNMENTS, BUT IT IS UNCLEAR YET HOW MUCH OF THIS ASSISTANCE WILL ACTUALLY BE FORTHCOMING.

THERE ARE NO SIGNS OF ANY SIGNIFICANT CORRUPTION.

THE GOVERNMENT OF SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE TAKES A FORTHRIGHT POSITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND APPEARS TO BE, SO FAR, REASONABLY CONSCIENTIOUS ABOUT FULFILLING ITS RESPONSIBILITIES IN THIS AREA. THE COUNTRY HAS ONLY BEEN INDEPENDENT FOR TWO YEARS, HOWEVER, AND THERE ARE SIGNS OF AN INCREASING CENTRALIZATION OF POLITICAL POWER AND A DETERIORATING ECONOMIC SITUATION. IT IS TOO EARLY TO TELL HOW THESE DEVELOPMENTS MAY AFFECT HUMAN RIGHTS IN SAO TOME IN THE FUTURE.

THERE HAVE NOT BEEN ANY REPORTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND WE ARE NOT AWARE OF ANY OUTSIDE INVESTIGATORS SHOWING ANY INTEREST IN THE COUNTRY. IF ALLEGATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS SHOULD APPEAR, WE WOULD EXPECT THE GOVERNMENT TO RESIST INDEPENDENT OUTSIDE INVESTIGATION.

B. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

THERE DO NOT APPEAR TO BE ANY PARTICULAR NEED FOR USG INVOLVEMENT IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN SAO TOME, AND THEREFORE NO NEED TO IDENTIFY OBJECTIVES FOR USG POLICY AND ACTIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

SAO TOME IS OF VERY LIMITED INTEREST TO THE UNITED STATES. IN CONNECTION WITH SAO TOME'S INDEPENDENCE, THE USG
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OFFERED A SMALL AID PROGRAM WHICH WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING (20 SAO TOME STUDENTS IN THE US; STUDY OF A POSSIBLE CROP PRODUCTION AND DIVERSIFICATION PROJECT,. WE DO NOT MAINTAIN A DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN THE COUNTRY; OUR AMBASSADOR IN LIBREVILLE, GABON BEING ACCREDITED AS A NON-RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE. OUR LEVERAGE IN THE COUNTRY IS EXTREMELY LIMITED, AND OUR MOST CONSTRUCTIVE POLICY WOULD APPEAR TO BE THAT OF OFFERING A SMALL AMOUNT OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AND ATTEMPT TO MAINTAIN A REASONABLY CORDIAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIP.

HOWEVER, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF SAO TOME IS DETERMINEDLY "PROGRESSIVE" IN ITS ATTITUDES AND IDEOLOGY AND VERY SUSPICIOUS OF THE USG AND OUR MOTIVES IN AFRICA. THE GOVERNMENT HAS CLOSE TIES WITH THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT OF ANGOLA, SO OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH SAO TOME MAY ULTIMATELY BE DETERMINED BY OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH LUANDA.

THE GOVERNMENT OF SAO TOME ITSELF IS PUBLICLY COMMITTED TO THE PURSUIT OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SO WILL PRESUMABLY APPROVE OF US EFFORTS IN THE SAME AREA. HOWEVER, AS A "PROGRESSIVE" REGIME OPPOSED TO "IMPERIALIST AND CAPITALIST" GOVERNMENTS, IT WILL USUALLY QUESTION OUR SINCERITY AND MOTIVES.

IN CONCLUSION, WE CAN SAY THAT SAO TOME IS A VERY SMALL MINI-STATE WITH A REASONABLY GOOD RECORD TO DATE IN HUMAN RIGHTS. IT IS PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH ITS OWN INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS, AND PLAYS AN EXTREMELY MINOR ROLE ON THE WORLD SCENE. US INTEREST, INVOLVEMENT, AND LEVERAGE IN SAO TOME ARE ESSENTIALLY NEGLIGIBLE. THE GOVERNMENT OF SAO TOME WILL SUPPORT IN THEORY THE USG POLICIES IN SUPPORT OF HUMAN RIGHTS, BUT BECAUSE OF THEIR OWN IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION, WILL REMAIN SUSPICIOUS OF USG MOTIVES. THERE APPEARS TO BE NO REASON TO ALTER OUR
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PRESENT POLICY TOWARDS SAO TOME, WHICH IS TO ATTEMPT TO CULTIVATE LOW-KEY DIALOGUE THROUGH OUR NON-RESIDENT AMBASSADOR WHILE PURSUING A MODEST ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.
CHRISTOPHER

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